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ABSTRACT

Current preschool programs for Mexican American children are examined. Programs are categorized as either experimental or as non-experimental. The emphasis of the experimental section is upon research findings, while the emphasis of the non-experimental section is upon the curriculum and its implementation. Six studies are discussed in the experimental section: the findings suggest that bilingual instruction is not superior to English or Spanish instruction in terms of student achievement. However, one study showed successful social adjustment on the part of Mexican American children involved in bilingual programs. Findings also showed integrated classrooms to facilitate achievement gains for Mexican Americans. Seventeen programs are discussed in the non-experimental section. Findings indicate that in some cases acquisition of a specific English vocabulary enables a greater percentage of Mexican American children than normal to progress to subsequent grades in school. Three outstanding features of these preschool programs are a bilingual approach, a greater degree of parental involvement than in most preschool programs, and an awareness and appreciation of the Mexican American cultural heritage. (Author/KM)

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PRESCHOOLS FOR MEXICAN AMERICANS: RESEARCH AND CURRICULUM

by

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"The greatest need of children seriously disadvantaged who must learn a second language outside the home is the opportunity to begin their learning at the lowest age at which formal education may be offered." (Manuel, 1968,p.72) Educators have responded to this need and have developed a variety of early childhood education programs to reduce the degree of deprivation experienced by Mexican Americans, the majority of whom must learn a second language outside the home.

It is the purpose of this paper to single out for examination current preschool programs for Mexican American children. Such a survey will serve as a valuable resource to the following audience: persons preparing to or currently teaching disadvantaged children, persons entering or currently working in early childhood education, persons desirous of understanding the unique problems of Mexican Americans, and to those educators seeking innovative approaches.

For purposes of discussion, programs are categorized as either experimental or as non-experimental. The emphasis of the experimental section is upon the research findings while the emphasis of the non-experimental section is upon the curriculum and the implementation thereof. The bulk of research projects reported in the first section pertains to the language variable. For example, a determination is made as to which language is most effective for use in the classroom as measured by pupil achievement. In addition, comparisons of English instruction, Spanish instruction or a combination of the two -- bilingual instruction are conducted by some researchers. Two variables other than language,however, have also

been given attention. First, comparisons are made among bilingual programs and programs with treatments other than a formalized language approach. And second, the influence of integrated classrooms on the performance of Mexican American children is compared with the influence of segregated classrooms.

The second section reports on programs in a simplest to most complex sequence. The sequence begins with programs whose curriculum objectives consist of the acquisition of a specific English vocabulary prior to first grade entry. Progressing along the continuum, a discussion ensues of programs using both English and Spanish,i.e. bilingual instruction. Increased complexity is then reported as programs are discussed whose curriculums are expanded. They include either an affective orientation as the content of bilingual instruction or a cognitive orientation as the content of bilingual instruction. These curriculums not only contain objectives of bilingual competence but also include objectives similar in native to those of preschool programs in general whose emphasis may be cognitive or affective skill development. The continuum concludes with programs whose elaborate curriculums are based upon a philosophy incorporating bilingual instruction along with both cognitive and affective skill development.

EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMS

A program comparing English instruction, Spanish instruction and bilingual instruction was conducted by Barclay (1969) in an

attempt to determine which language would be most effective in enhancing the development and achievement of preschool children. Sixty-seven Head Start Mexican American children were included in the sample and received seven weeks of language training. Barclay used three groups and a control group. One group of children was given Spanish language instruction, a second group was given English language instruction and a third group was given both English and Spanish instruction. The control group received no formal language instruction. Pre and post test data plus an additional post test the following spring revealed that none of the structured language treatments produced better scores than the control group treatment. Also, bilingual treatment was not significantly superior to Spanish or English treatment separately. The author recognized, however, that since groups were initially of varying ability, final differences in performance could have been due to their initial difference in ability . A replication of this study, controlling the ability variable, would aid program directors in making the choice among English, Spanish or bilingual instruction.

Valencia (1970) also used three treatment groups and a control group to determine which language was most effective with Mexican American preschool children. The first group consisted of children using non-standard English. They received an English oral language program. The second group, consisting of non-Spanish speaking children and Spanish surnamed children with Spanish oral language deficiencies received a Spanish Oral language program. The third

group, consisting of children with a basic structure and phonology in Spanish received a Spanish language arts program. The control group, which was composed of children having differing degrees of English proficiency was instructed using the I.T.P.A. An analysis of covariance provided consistent indications in support of the superiority of the English oral language program. As with Barclay's findings, however, a qualifying statement was made with regards to the findings. Valencia's evaluation concluded that the Spanish language programs did not appear as well developed as the English programs and that findings must be interpreted with this consideration in mind.

A third study, longitudinal in nature, also examined language instruction as it affected children's achievement. The Bilingual Education Project in Harlandale Independent School District in San Antonio, Texas (John & Horner, 1971) used experimental groups who received Spanish instruction to a greater or lesser degree depending upon the individual teacher and a control group of children receiving no Spanish instruction. Evaluation of the experimental and control groups was made on the basis of pupil reading achievement. Results showed that bilingual sections did as well as but not superior to classes instructed only in English. A serious flaw in this study,however, was the unknown nature and amount of Spanish instruction given the experimental groups.

Nedler's (1971) research compared a bilingual program with programs using a treatment other than language. Those children in

the planned bilingaul program received a daily three hour program for nine months. The second program involved children indirectly by giving direct instruction to their parents concerning health, nutrition and childhood education. The staff met several times weekly with the parents. The third comparison program consisted of children who received the typcial traditional day care center treatment. Pre and post tests, using the Leiter International Performance Scale and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test in English and Spanish, showed on all measures that children in the planned bilingual program had significantly greater gains than children whose parents were in a parent education program or children involved in a traditional day care program.

Hindsman (1969) studied the effects of bilingual instruction using migrant and non-migrant populations. Children in the planned bilingual program were migrant Mexican American children while children in the day care center were non-migrant. On the pre test non-migrant day care program children scored higher than migrant children who had just entered the experimental program. Post tests, however, showed that migrant children who participated in the bilingual program scored significantly higher than non-migrant day care program children. A secondary finding within the experimental group showed that children whose teachers had high scores on the Minnesota Teachers Attitude Inventory performed better on the Preschool Attainment Record than students whose teachers had low scores.

The last program dealing with bilingualism was Waddell's

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(John & Horner, 1971) Del Rio Bilingual Program. Evaluation was completed on a Spanish language arts program designed for integrated classes. Beginning in grade one, children had thirty to forty-five minutes of daily instruction in Spanish language arts. Music, physical education, health and safety were also taught in Spanish. By the fourth month, children were instructed for sixty minutes daily in Spanish and other subjects ceased to be taught in Spanish. By the end of first grade, ninety minutes of Spanish instruction was presented. A control group of children received the traditional first grade curriculum. Waddell's results showed no significant difference between experimental and control groups with respect to English competence but the experimental group showed superior socialization and adjustment. Outstanding results were achieved when English-speaking and Spanish-speaking children were integrated.

Should disadvantaged children be group homogeneously? Waddell's findings suggest that the answer is "no" and Henderson (1969) would add additional support to this response. Henderson placed disadvantaged Mexican American children in three separate groups. The first group consisted of a combination of advantaged Anglos and disadvantaged Mexican American children enrolled in a preschool program. The second group consisted totally of Mexican American children involved in a Head Start program. The third group consisted totally of Mexican American children with no preschool program. Post tests showed that children in the experimental integrated group

made greater gains than children in either Head Start or no program.

Summation of research findings concerning Mexican American preschools would suggest that bilingual instruction is not superior to English instruction or Spanish instruction in terms of various forms of student achievement. Bilingual instruction was found to be less effective than English or Spanish instruction by one study of those surveyed. Bilingual instruction was considered superior as measured by pupil achievement only when compared to programs with no language emphasis. An important aspect of bilingual instruction, as noted in one study, was the success in social adjustment on the part of Mexican American children involved in such programs. Research pertaining to integrated classrooms has shown that Mexican American children make gains in achievement, especially when integrated with advantaged Anglos, as compared to those segregated. Finally, it should be noted that these conclusions are rather tenous because the research completed is few in number, very limited in external validity due to the narrow population sampled and often characterized as lacking in internal validity due to techniques lacking in rigor.

NON-EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMS

"Educators concur that the major emphasis of preschool curricula for Mexican American children needs to be language development." (Brussel, 1968, p.85) The majority of programs have adopted this viewpoint and lean heavily toward bilingual education. John and Horner (1971, p. 13) comment on the wave of bilingual

programs by stating,

> "Some educators who doubted the wisdom of teaching children in their native language modified their attitude after the publication of the Coleman Report. The Coleman finding that a positive self concept is a crucial attribute of the successful student has contributed to a re-evaluation of the role of the minority child's language and culture. Bilingual education is now envisioned by an increasing number of administrators as one aspect of programmatic endeavors to increase the self respect of children who are not part of the 'mainstream'."

Some program implementers have elaborated upon a language emphasis by including an affective or cognitive orientation in their curriculums. The most complex programs are those whose curriculums include goals of language competence along with both affective skill development and cognitive skill development.

Due to the high rate of first grade failure among Mexican American children, Harrell (John & Horner, 1971) and Frazier (John & Horner, 1971) designed a curriculum consisting of those English words necessary to begin grade one. Upon completion of the curriculum, pupils were to be able to communicate and understand instructions given in first grade. Frazier's program devoted two hours of the four hour summer day to language instruction. Harrell utilized small group, more individualized instruction for a nine month program. Of those children participating in Frazier's summer program, seventy-six percent were promoted to second grade at the end of first grade. Promotion percentages in previous years averaged eighteen percent for Mexican American children.

Two other studies used the acquisition of a specific English vocabulary prior to first grade as their objective. Poulos (1959) working with 193 kindergarten children had as his objective, the teaching of 620 frequently used English words and sixty-three common expressions. Differing from Poulos only slightly, Sister Jean-Marie's (1965) curriculum objectives included 600 frequently used words and sixty common expressions to be acquired by her pupils. In addition, both programs attempted to help children speak in complete sentences and orient themselves to school life. Ninety percent of children from Poulos' program did achieve promotion after their first year in school and Sister Jean-Marie noted a significant gain for all children in her program using the Metropolitan Reading Test.

"Initiating a child into the school routine in his native language enables him to meet the difficulties of the first year under the most favorable conditions." (Manuel, 1971) There are four well-developed bilingual programs discussed in the literature which adopt this viewpoint. The first of these is the preschool program of the Good Samaritan Center in San Antonio, Texas (Brussel, 1971). The program has separate classes for children three, four, and five years of age. Within each of these classes, children are grouped according to ability. Classes for three year olds are taught only in Spanish the first half of the year and are taught in Spanish eighty percent of the time during the second half of the year. Fifteen minute formal English and Spanish language periods are conducted throughout the year. Classes composed of four and five year old children have formal English

and formal Spanish language periods for twenty minutes each. These language instruction periods are conducted in a Bereiter-Engleman manner. A 2,700 word list have been developed by the four program design specialists and sorted by content units. The teacher then structures her lessons around these units. The units are presented in a unique manner: if the concept is a familiar one to the children, it is introduced in English; if the concept is unfamiliar to the children, it is introduced in Spanish. Another element of the program is structured to develop community-school communication. This is done by means of a man and a woman living in the local neighborhood who serve as both aides in the classroom and as liason between parents of children in the program and the staff conducting the program.

The second bilingual program to be discussed in the Follow Through Project and Corpus Christ, Texas (John & Horner, 1971). Kindergarten children are instructed first in Spanish and then in English. In grade one and two, instruction is bilingual in language arts, art, and music. Students are grouped according to proficiency in English for math, social studies and science. They are instruction in English for these subjects.

The Applied Language Research Center (John & Horner, 1971) in El Paso, Texas is also bilingual. Students in this program are bussed to a language lab for one hour daily. During this hour, thirty minutes is devoted to intensive oral English practice, fifteen minutes to pre or post sessions and fifteen minutes is spent in an individual listening booth. At the beginning of the

program, listening booth tapes are in Spanish only. After a few weeks, tapes are switched to English three days out of five. During the preschool day, teaching is in English during the morning and Spanish in the afternoon.

The fourth bilingual program has cognitive skill development as the content for bilingual instruction. Miranda (1968) has developed a language curriculum consisting of fifty-nine English circles and sixty-one Spanish circles to be used at a rate of three per day for eight weeks. The Spanish lessons prepare pupils in their first language for the context in their second language--English. The conceptual focus in these circles include spatial and temporal relations, classification and seriation. Piagetian concepts are therefore the focus of their English and Spanish circles.

The Zapata Bilingual Program (Gonzalez in John & Horner, 1971) in kindergarten and grade one combines affective skill development with language instruction. Oral language instruction in both languages is supplemented with dramatics, pantomine, puppets, etc. to further the child's socialization and concept of self.

Ott (John & Horner, 1971) and Swikard (1969) have adapted their goal of language skill development to include reading readiness. Ott's program is longitudinal and includes children from preschool to grade four. The goals include the development, testing and refining of a curriculum in language and reading suitable to the needs of Mexican American children. Skill development in Spanish

is included as a continous and ongoing process. The pupils move progressively through learning experiences according to their own developmental rate.

Swikart (1969) designed a curriculum for nursery, kindergarten and beginning first grade migrant children. The goals are behaviorally outlined according to initial reading instruction activities. Language patterns difficult for the migrant children have been isolated. The two main problems of reading readiness for the Mexican American child, as detected by Swikart, are comprehending meaning of words and articulation rhythm of English. The program, as published, is well organized and developmentally sequenced.

Clark Knowlton has observed that, "Those educators developing new bilingual programs should note that the instruction use of the Spanish language in the classroom is not sufficient in itself to improve the education of Mexican American children and that a new curriculum must be devised with cultural as well as language requirements." (Knowlton, 1966, p.4) In keeping with this viewpoint, several studies in the literature have developed curriculums including aspects of the Mexican American culture. While it must be kept in mind that several of the programs discussed above contained additional elements in their curriculums, they were generally de-emphasized and less time was spent in their development and instruction than is the case in programs to be discussed.

Larick's (Brussel, 1968) St. Paul Episcopal Church in

Brownsville, Texas, Rock's (Brussel, 1968) West San Antonio Heights Kindergarten in San Antonio and Jone's (Brussel, 1968) preschool program in San Antonio School District are all programs with a "total child" emphasis. Goals they have in common include helping children learn their first language better while simultaneously obtaining a coordinate control of a second language, preparing children for entry into school by giving them reading and basic math concepts, introducing children to experience outside their normal environment with bilingual vocabulary of each experience, appreciating knowledge of their culture, strengthening physical and motor skills, expanding cognitive horizons and involving parents. Many other programs have mentioned parent involvement but programs in this section view parent involvement as a specific goal of their curriculum.

Nedler's (1967) program deserves mention because it runs contrary to conventional wisdom. The current preschool programs surveyed have incorporated the recommendation of Clark Knowlton who commented that, "The greatest obstacle to a successful solution of some of these programs is the tendency the the Anglo-American administrator to assume that his goals, values and attitudes are shared by the Mexican American. Until program implementers are willing to develop programs within the cultural framework of the Mexican American, their programs will continue to have little impact." (Knowlton, 1971, p. 174) Nedler's program, however, incorporates such objectives as providing children with an opportunity to both compete and achieve. In addition, attention is

directed to long range goals and a future time orientation. These attributes run counter to the Mexican American culture. Generally, the Mexican American enjoys the present and does not worry about the future. This disposition is closely tied to his religious beliefs and total view of destiny. Because of a being rather than doing orientation, the inculcation of a desire to compete and achieve would produce an internal conflict. For this reason, the goals of Nedler's program are in disharmony with the Mexican American value system. Other programs reviewed gradually assist each child bridge the gap to the Anglo society with understanding and appreciation of the Mexican American culture as a basis for gaining the Anglo tools of language.

Two well known programs in the field of early childhood education that advocate a "total child" approach are Nimnicht's (Evans, 1971) "New Nursery School" in Greeley, Colorado and Marie Hughes (1968) Tuscon Early Education Model. Nimnicht has incorporated as part of the total curriculum, O.K. Moore's responsive environment, Martin Deutsch's enriched nursery school for disadvantaged children and Maria Montessori's manipulatory techniques. The school has four main objectives: to develop a positive self image, to increase sensory motor and perceptual skills, to develop cognitive skills and to improve language skills. Children are engaged in three hour sessions daily in which most of their time is spent in self directing activities. Fifteen minutes per day is devoted to group

activities although this is optional. The New Nursery School philosophy is one of self-direction and self-reward. The child is encouraged and given opportunities to develop a method of self-learning.

The Tuscon Early Education model program is for Mexican American children in grades one through three. The objectives of this model program are similar to Nimnicht: to develop language competence, to acquire skills necessary in the process of learning, to acquire attitudes and behavioral characterisitcs related to productive social involvement and to learn arts and skills associated with social interaction, transmission of information and scientific advancement. A somewhat more academic tone than Nimnicht"s is noted in Hughes' model. Each classroom teacher in the Tuscon model is assisted by a rotating team of technical consultants. The Head Start portion of the Tuscon Model emphasizes gross motor skills, sensory skills, classification skills, skills in using examples and plan following and pattern recognition. Kits are prepared for the sequenced levels of instruction. Stimuli from the natural environment and reinforcement contingency management were used in the program. One to one instruction has been introduced because group organization has failed to develop desired behaviors for some children. This one change represents the Tuscon Model's adaptation to the Mexican American culture. Mexican Americans are generally wary of others

outside the extended family and have not formed or joined many community groups because of this tendency. Primarily, friendships develop on a one-to-one basis. The individualized approach now adopted by the Tuscon model is in keeping with the cultural framework.

SUMMARY OF NON-EXPERIMENTAL PROGRAMS

Findings indicate that in some cases acquisition of a specific English vocabulary enables a greater percentage of Mexican American children than normal to progress to subsequent grades in school: thus the goal of basic language programs has generally been achieved. The sequenced, structured bilingual language programs do not publish their evaluations, perhaps because the purpose of their publications is simply to discuss their curricula. In general, these programs have a definite time allotment for Spanish and English instruction. Graduated instruction from Spanish to English is a format used by most of the sequenced, structured language programs. Also, continuation of Spanish either in the form of direct instruction or as a language arts enrichment feature occurs in subsequent years. Reading readiness language programs extend features of the language programs to reading readiness activities. The two reading readiness programs reported herein give detailed behavioral objectives to be completed by each child.

The elaborate "total child" programs have integrated aspects of traditional nursery schools, programs emphasizing the affective domain, the cognitive domain, programs for disadvantaged children and also some unique features applicable primarily to the needs of Mexican American children. Those features from the traditional nursery school include sensory and perceptual discrimination,

development of gross motor skills through indoor and outdoor play, singing, art, games, nap time and story telling. Portions of the affective domain programs are development of a positive self concept, individual expression, self direction, pacing and self-initiation of learning. Adaptations from a cognitive philosophy include either an environment where cognitive activites are available for the child to explore, or a more structured small group or even a one-to-one instruction mode. Most programs for disadvantaged children devote time to correct English use: this is also true of Mexican American preschool programs. Other common features include food services to supplement deficient diets and field trips to expand experience horizons of children.

The most outstanding feature unique to programs for Mexican American children is the bilingual approach. Rather than a denunciation of Spanish, as has been the case in Mexican-American educational history, continuous development of the language and a concurrent introduction and development of English has taken priority. Thus, a gradual transition into the Anglo world is possible for Mexican American children.

A much greater degree of parental involvement than is generally included in most preschool programs is a planned and integral part of the curriculum and classroom activities. Educators apparently are becoming cognizant of the atomistic nature of the Mexican American family and are capitalizing upon it to design more effective pre-school programs.

A third and final unique feature of these preschool programs is the awareness and appreciation of the Mexican American cultural heritage. A substantial number of programs exhibit this in daily classroom objectives and activities. However, it should be added, that this one feature is still rather undeveloped and yet probably has the greatestpotential for enhancing the Mexican American child"s ability to succeed.

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